

The Hideous Heart

by Greenway

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Summary: Draco Malfoy was convinced he alone knew the answer. He knew it because it was both singular and complex. It was the weight at the bottom of his heart. It was the only feeling that remained. They could win, and win, and win, but they could not escape.

The Hideous Heart

PROLOGUE

The universe had no interest in fairness. Concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, were merely the fickle edge of a persistent blade. There existed this silly assumption that when bad men fell a sense of balance was restored, a triumph of the virtuous over the wicked few who snuck in through the night and enveloped the world in darkness.

This was a lie. A lie the world wanted desperately for you to believe. It said, do the right thing, fight the good fight, and tomorrow light will shine on your every endeavour. Now more than ever this lie was swallowed by the hungry masses. They feasted atop Lord Voldemort's still smouldering ashes, thinking that perhaps the evil of the world was contained within the Dark Lord's dark heart. But, they asked, convinced of their salvation, what darkness could possibly linger with his long shadow forever vanquished?

Draco Malfoy, returned to Hogwarts scarcely a month previous, was convinced he alone knew the answer. He knew it because it was both singular and complex. It was the weight at the bottom of his heart. It was the only thing he ever felt anymore. They could win, and win, and win, but they could not escape.

No, the universe was not a fair place, though there was but one measure of fairness they all faced, and that in the end defeated them all.

Time.

And time would wipe the smile from Harry Potter's face. It would steal the skip from Hermione Granger's step. Snatch the joy from Ronald Weasley's vacant head. These three more than any others were the embodiment of the universe's long and cruel practical joke. They cherished this brave new world but they, like their peers, like their mothers and fathers and their children still to come, were all of them deceived.

Draco felt the slow, inevitable passage of time so acutely that the beating of his heart was as the ticking of a clock. An apt analogy, if he did say so himself, for the deception would snatch their hearts from their chests and turn them all to dust.

It was fitting he learn this, life's most important lesson, within the hallowed grounds of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Eight years ago he had been ferried off to _learn_. Eight years later, he could not unsee what the fires of war had shown him. This world of theirs had a hideous heart. It would take them all into the darkness and without warning, without reason, it would _push_.

Every day he asked himself what he was doing here. Yes, he knew why he came, but not why he stayed. He came because he had hoped to feel again. He had hoped to shake the shackles from his heart and find within some lingering spark of life, a desperate beat in the endless dark. But there was no answer within himself â€" only the pain of the enlightened mind and the endless passage of despair.

This left but one certainty about Draco. Ever cruel and cunning, a spiteful quip never far from his tongue, a moral cowardice in his heart that even he could not deny, well these were merely window dressings to fool the inattentive eye. Beneath any sense of self he retained, beneath the Draco the war had kindly left behind, was a prevailing sense of numbness that seeped so very deep into his pores that he had but one option: to fall. To let the abyss claim him.

Unsurprisingly, the abyss had no mercy, because a push and a fall were not so different after all. Each needed an end. Each was in such a sense defined. And yes, desperately â€" because the broken had no fear of desperation â€" he yearned to reach the bottom. That he might, finally, feel the fall and, what's more, step into the light and look upon the damage and know, finally, that one elusive truth the darkness had kept from him â€" what was left of Draco Malfoy?

See, though his mind remained intact, enough at least to articulate his madness, it was but one third of an equation, and said equation needed his heart, it needed his soul, to balance and measure the mess that he had become.

So now he watched. He watched the world go by.

Every day he sought an escape. And every day his desperation, like his fall, grew dangerous and deep.

End

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